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ARGENTINA AND CHILE: THE STRUGGLE FOR PATAGONIA 1843-1881

THE statue of the Christ of the Andes commemorates the termination of a sixty-year boundary controversy that on several occasions brought Argentina and Chile to the brink of war.[1] The dispute amicably resolved by King Edward VII of England in 1902 grew out of the Treaty of 1881, in which the two nations agreed for the first time on the boundaries in Patagonia, and in the Straits of Magellan and Tierra del Fuego, that we take for granted today. The dispute that preceded the Treaty of 1881 was long and bitter. For although Patagonia and the adjacent areas were without question possessions of the Spanish crown, official neglect throughout the colonial period had denied to either successor state a clear title over them based on *uti possidetis*.[2]

The Treaty of 1881 that recognized Argentine sovereignty over virtually all of Patagonia is the subject of recriminations by nationalistic Chilean historians of the twentieth century, Francisco Encina foremost among them.[3] They argue that Chile had a legal right to Patagonia, and that it had the power to make good its claim to it. Contrasting Chile in the twentieth century, limited in resources, hemmed in by the cordillera and overshadowed by the enormous potential of its neighbor to the east, with the predominance that it enjoyed in the nineteenth century, they argue that it was the Treaty of 1881 that upset the balance of power in South America. They therefore characterize that treaty as surrender, with the connotation that Chile's birthright was therein betrayed.

[1]This paper was originally presented at the Missouri Valley History Conference, March 10-12, 1977.

[2]Gordon Ireland, *Boundaries, Possessions and Conflicts in South America* (Cambridge; Harvard University Press, 1938; reprint ed., New York: Octagon Books, 1971), pp. 20-27.

[3]Francisco A. Encina, *Historia de Chile, Desde la Prehistoria Hasta 1891*, 20 vols. (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Nascimento, 1949-52), vols. 14-17; Charles C. Griffin, "Francisco Encina and Revisionism in Chilean History," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 37 (1957): 1-28; Alejandro Magnet, *Nuestros Vecinos Argentinos* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial del Pacifico, 1956), pp. 336-41.

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To examine the validity of the nations' respective historical claims, based on *uti possidetis*, is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that neither had so clear a title that it was willing to risk arbitration. The purpose here is rather to examine whether Chile actually wanted all of Patagonia, and whether taking it was within her capabilities. The subject was first suggested by a study which revealed that to Argentine leaders of the nineteenth century, General Julio A. Roca's "Conquest of the Desert" of 1878 and 1879, that terminated the century-long struggle with the Indians for possession of the pampas, had a strategic significance as the culmination of a contest for empire with Chile, in which the prize was Patagonia.

The Chilean constitution of 1833 established as national boundaries Cape Horn on the south and the Andean cordillera on the east. To the south, Chile in reality occupied only to the line of the Río Bío-Bío, at Concepción, and such strong points as Valdivia beyond it. The Araucanians remained virtually sovereign south of the Bío-Bío, blocking expansion as their ancestors had for three centuries. The government had little incentive to remove them, and popular sentiment, nourished by Ercilla's epic, reinforced the reluctance to do so. To the east, the pampas and Patagonia, populated by fierce Indians, were little known and were considered of little value.[4] Chilean attention, as from the first days of the colony, was directed northward. There was Panama, still an important focus of international trade. There was Peru, which Chile meant to challenge for commercial hegemony of the Pacific coast of South America.[5]

Chilean attention was turned southward, to the strait, and eastward, to Patagonia, by the advent of steam navigation. The Pacific Steamship Navigation Company's first two steamers, the *Chile* and the *Peru*, sailed from England to Valparaiso in 1840. Rather than follow the sailing route around the Horn, they passed through the Straits of Magellan, dramatically transforming it into an important international waterway for the first time. Steam would soon divert to Valparaiso much of the traffic then going through Panama, offering to Chile the commercial supremacy to which she aspired. Control of the strait suddenly became economically and strategically vital to Chile.[6] Its importance was recognized by others as well, however. In the 1820's and 1830's expeditions from

[4]Encina, 14: 202-05, 543-64.

[5]Magnet, pp. 295-307.

[6]Robert N. Burr, *By Reason or Force: Chile and the Balancing of Power in South America, 1830-1905* (Berkeley, 1965), pp. 70-72.

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England and France had studied the area, and since neither Argentina nor Chile had occupied the strait, or Patagonia or Tierra del Fuego either, European occupation was considered imminent.[7] Chile therefore founded Fort Bulnes on the Brunswick Peninsula in 1843 to establish her claim to the strait and to adjacent territory in Patagonia. The government of President Manuel Bulnes had no doubt of its right to exercise sovereignty in the vicinity of Fort Bulnes, or of Punta Arenas on the eastern side of the Brunswick Peninsula, to which it moved the colony in 1849. But it specifically disclaimed any right to exercise sovereignty over the eastern portion of the strait. Its precipitious action was intended to forestall European intervention, not provoke a quarrel with Argentina.[8]

Buenos Aires protested, belatedly, in 1847. An intermittent debate followed that culminated in the publication in 1853 of Miguel Luis Amunátegui's *Titles of the Republic of Chile to Sovereignty and Dominion of the Extreme South of the American Continent* which, in a radical departure from the traditional Chilean position and from the Constitution of 1833, contended that Chile had a valid claim, based on crown documents, not only to the strait in the vicinity of its colony, but to all of Patagonia as well.[9] With Amunátegui's report as the basis, the territory of Magallanes, of which the colony at Punta Arenas was capital, was soon enlarged to include the Río Santa Cruz on the Atlantic.[10] Chilean claims were extended northward to the Río Negro on the Atlantic, and the Río Diamante, on the latitude of Buenos Aires, in the cordillera.[11] The historical evidence and the arguments set forth in Amunátegui's book provided the basis of the controversy that subsequently raged between the two countries.

Whatever the legal validity of the claims, the Constitution of 1833 in establishing the cordillera as the boundary, and the Chilean government in its 1843 abnegation of the eastern half of the strait, had renounced them. The Treaty of 1856, basically a commercial agreement between Argentina and Chile, was therefore used by the latter to reclaim its rights. In article thirty-nine of that document, both countries agreed to

[7]Alfonso Aguirre Humeres, *Relaciones Históricas de Magallanes: La Toma de Posesión del Estrecho y Fundación de una Colonia por la República de Chile en 1843* (Santiago de Chile: Imprenta Chile, 1943), pp. 63-82, 153-57, 280-81.

[8]Encina, 15: 35-44; Magnet, pp. 295-98.

[9]Burr, pp. 73-96; Encina, 14: 110-11.

[10]Encina, 16: 143-88.

[11]Encina, 14: 111-17; Argentine Republic, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, *Memoria Presentada al Congreso Nacional* (Buenos Aires: Various publishers, 1867-1882), 1882, pp. x-xxv (hereafter cited as Arg. Rep., MRE, *Memoria*).

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recognize as boundaries those which each had possessed at the time of separation from Spain in 1810; to settle questions at issue pertaining to them peacefully; and, if unable to agree, to submit the questions to arbitration by a friendly power. But they did not establish what the limits were in 1810; or what each claimed in 1856. Chile thus had a fresh start in its play for territorial expansion.[12] Negotiations over the boundary were deferred until the 1870's, when Chilean Minister of Foreign Relations Adolfo Ibáñez initiated discussions with the Argentine Minister to Santiago, Félix Frias. Both attached great importance to Patagonia, and the discussions between negotiators and feelings between countries became increasingly embittered as the decade progressed, and brought them to the brink of war in 1878.

Despite its ambitious territorial claims, however, Chile evidenced surprisingly little interest in Patagonia. Punta Arenas, its instrument of effective occupation of the strait, had only 202 souls in 1861. It was, furthermore, a penal colony, a weak foundation for an instrument of empire. Only in the 1870's was it placed on a secure footing, with the introduction of sheep from the Falklands. But even then it suffered from sufficient neglect that its garrison revolted in November 1877 to the cry of "*Viva los argentinos!*" Chile failed to occupy the Río Santa Cruz, which it claimed for the northern boundary of the territory of Magallanes on the Atlantic, while Argentine neglect might have permitted her to do so. Nor did she occupy even the Atlantic end of the strait, which she considered vital to her national security and development, and which became a central issue in the bitter disputes of the 1870's.[13]

In contrast with the struggling colony in the strait, Chileans had clearly taken possession of the eastern slopes of the Andes by the 1870's. The cordillera on the latitude of Buenos Aires, physically isolated by the arid pampas and its hostile Indian masters from the Argentine Republic, was geographically and economically part of Chile. It remained so until the end of the nineteenth century. Just as the eastern piedmont settlements of Cuyo had been settled from Chile in colonial times, migrations continued when the eastern side of the cordillera became the possessions, in turn, of the vice-royalty of La Plata and the Argentine Republic. The annual flow varied between eight hundred and a thousand, even as late as 1879, and by that year the total population was probably about thirty thousand. Initially congregating on the latitude of Buenos Aires, their

[12]Encina, 14: 117-19; Magnet, pp. 298-302; José M. Irarrázaval Larrain, *La Patagonia, Errores Geográficos y Diplomáticos* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Andres Bello, 1966), pp. 80-82.

[13]Encina, 16: 143-88; Magnet, pp. 295-307.

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trend of settlement was progressively southward, and they eventually entered the Neuquén Valley opposite the Araucanian heartland of Chile. They established groups of cattle and sheep ranches known as "Chilecitos." Chilean officials lived among them, and both Chileans and the Indians of the cordillera recognized their authority.[14]

South of the Neuquén Valley lay the other great affluent of the Río Negro, the Limay, and Lake Nahuel Huapí from which it flows. The lake is at the northern end of a great natural corridor, the Pre-Andean Depression, that leads along the foot of the Andes to the strait. First described by George Musters who travelled it in 1869-70,[15] it was the only land route to the strait from either Chile or Buenos Aires. The most hospitable part of Patagonia, it was there, and in the fertile valleys that lead off from it into the desert, that the bulk of the Indian population lived. The Pre-Andean Depression, and not the Atlantic coast, was the great north-south highway, and the key to the control of Patagonia by either Chile or Argentina.[16] The spontaneous southward flow of settlers from Chile directly into it that would have enabled her to control Patagonia was blocked by the Araucanian tribes to the south of the Bío-Bío. Chilean communications with the eastern Andes did not extend beyond the upper Neuquén Valley.[17]

In the vast area between the cordillera and the Atlantic and south to Punta Arenas, Chile sought to establish its claim to effective occupation by securing recognition of its sovereignty from the Indians. Military rank and pay, and presents, were conferred on the chiefs in exchange for such recognition. The Argentines were competing for their allegiance, however, and the Indians, astutely consulting their own interests, played each off against the other.[18]

Argentina evidenced no greater interest in Patagonia than did Chile.

[14]Encina, 17: 576-93; Arg. Rep., MRE, *Memoria*, 1879, I: 287-306; Bartolomé Galíndez, *La Conquista del Desierto* (Buenos Aires; Comisión Nacional Monumento al Teniente General Roca, 1940), p. 197; Manual J. Olascoaga, *Estudio Topográfico de la Pampa y Río Negro*, 2 vols. (Buenos Aires; Comisión Nacional Monumento al Teniente General Roca, 1938-40); I: 40-45; Idem, *Estudio Topográfico de la Pampa y Río Negro* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Ostwald y Martínez, 1880), pp. 16-18. (All references are to the two-volume 1938-40 edition unless otherwise noted. The 1880 edition contains a bitter attack on Chile subsequently omitted.)

[15]George C. Muster, *At Home with the Patagonians* (London: John Murray, 1873).

[16]Olascoaga, 1880 ed., pp. 11-13; Galíndez, pp. 226-32; Preston E. James, *Latin America*, 4th ed. (New York: Odyssey Press, 1969), pp. 623-30; Argentine Republic, Comisión Científica de la Expedición al Río Negro, 1879, *Informe Oficial* (Buenos Aires: Ostwald y Martinez, 1881), pp. xxii-xxiv.

[17]Encina, 14: 560-64; 17: 576-93.

[18]Encina, 16: 143-88.

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There was an Argentine colony on the Río Negro in the 1840's. But farther south the inhospitable Atlantic coast had been neglected by the Buenos Aires government even under the Spanish Empire. Early nineteenth-century observers described Argentina as defined by the Río de la Plata, the cordillera and the Río Negro.[19] The strait was thus seemingly beyond its purview in the 1840's. Even Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, a future president of Argentina then in exile in Santiago, had counseled the Chilean government to found the colony in the strait, and denied that his country had grounds for challenging it in 1847.[20] But that Argentina's ambitions extended southward is seen in a study by Pedro de Angelis, published in 1852, stating Argentina's case for title to Patagonia, the strait and Tierra del Fuego. Amunátegui's study of the following year was Chile's bid to refute the claims of Angelis.[21]

The focus of Argentine national attention until the 1870's was on the international arena of the Río de la Plata. Nevertheless Argentina determined to make good its claims to Patagonia beginning in the 1860's. A colony was founded on the Río Chubut, on the central coast, and an outpost was established on the Río Santa Cruz, far to the south, to trade with the Indians. In the 1870's expeditions systematically explored from the Río Negro to the Río Santa Cruz and from the Atlantic to the cordillera. The most extensive and the most famous were those of Francisco Moreno, whose reports, published in Buenos Aires in 1878 when tensions over the boundary dispute were at their highest, reinforced Argentine resolution to possess Patagonia.[22]

In reality, however, Argentina did not effectively occupy even as far as the Río Negro until Roca's Conquest of the Desert was completed in 1879. The frontier on the pampas until then expanded and contracted in response to the fortunes of Indian warfare. Until the 1870's it never extended more than a hundred miles from the Río de la Plata, and farther west its southward limit was approximately on the latitude of Buenos Aires. The pampas beyond the frontier was dominated by fierce mounted Indians who carried on constant warfare against their Argentine neighbors, and a lucrative cattle trade with their Chilean neighbors.[23]

[19]Woodbine Parish, *Buenos Ayres and the Provinces of the Río de la Plata* (London: John Murray, 1852), pp. 79-88.

[20]Aguirre, pp. 63-82, 118-23; Irarrázaval, pp. 113-24.

[21]Pedro de Angelis, *Memoria históricas sobre los derechos de soberanía y dominio de la Confederación Argentina a la parte austral del continente americano* (1852); Burr, pp. 73-96; Encina, 14: 110-14; Magnet, pp. 295-98.

[22]Encina, 15: 152-62; 16: 143-88; Irarrázaval, pp. 157-89.

[23]Olascoaga, 1880 ed., pp. 14-20.

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The Indians were Araucanians whose ancestors, or in many cases who themselves, had been attracted eastward from the cordillera and from Chile beyond by the enormous livestock herds of the eastern pampas. Those herds provided the focus of their lives. Horses were as vital to the Indians of the pampas as they were to those of the Great Plains in the United States. Cattle, on the other hand, had commercial importance. Since mid-eighteenth century the cattle of the pampas had found ready markets in Chile among hide dealers and the *saladeros* producing salted and jerked meat for the Pacific ports. The annual volume of the trade was estimated in the 1870's at forty thousand head. Some observers charged that it was so vast that it undercut legitimate commerce between the Argentine provinces and Chile, and it seems beyond question that it affected the price of beef in southern Chile.[24]

The cattle offered for sale by the pampas Indians were obtained by raiding the ranches of the Argentine frontier. For a century before the Conquest of the Desert that frontier was the scene of continuous bloody conflict, as Indians sought to share in the animal wealth of the eastern plains. Warrior columns from the Araucanian lands of Chile, who looked to the east for the opportunity to get rich, continually reinforced their allies of the pampas, and the pillaging expeditions resembled a war without quarter. They struck without warning from out of the desert to drive off herds of cattle, horses, and even sheep. They captured women and children as well when opportunity offered, then vanished with their booty back into the desert, leaving behind destruction, death and terror. Argentine military forces seemed powerless against them. Mounted columns that pursued into the pampas returned on foot, defeated not by the Indians, who usually eluded them, but by an equally formidable adversary, the unknown desert itself.[25]

The Indians drove their cattle westward along well-established trail networks that the passage of innumerable hooves over long periods of time had engraved deeply into the surface of the pampas. They were known to the Indians as *Caminos de los Chilenos*, and they linked the frontiers of the Argentine provinces to the passes in the cordillera that led to Chile, offering pastures, firewood and fresh water enroute.[26] Most

[24]Olascoaga, I: 40-45; Irarrázaval, pp. 157-89; Simon G. Hanson, *Argentine Meat and the British Market* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1938), pp. 4-6.

[25]Arg. Rep., MRE, *Memoria*, 1877, I: 228; Parish, pp. 136-46; Richard O. Perry, "Warfare on the Pampas in the 1870's," *Military Affairs* 36 (1972), 52-58.

[26]Olascoaga, I: 182; 1880 ed., pp. 13-14; Argentine Republic, Ministerio de Guerra y Marina, *Memoria Presentada al Congreso Nacional* (Buenos Aires: Various publishers, 1872-1881), 1879, pp. 362-76.

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of the trails crossed the Río Nequén and entered what today is Argentina's Neuquén province. To the west, the cordillera that now forms the Chilean border is relatively low, with several passes open throughout the year. Beyond those passes lay the lands of the unconquered Araucanians of Chile and the Chilean provinces that constituted the principal markets for the stolen cattle.[27] The commerce in stolen cattle that the Indians carried on with the Chilean merchants was the single most important cause of the warfare that ravaged the Argentine frontier. It oriented the vast areas beyond that frontier westward to the Pacific, rather than to the Río de la Plata, despite the formidable barriers of the arid pampas and the Andes. It gave to Chile control of the pampas, influence over its ferocious inhabitants, and, in the opinion of Argentine authorities, the military means to make good its claim to Patagonia.

In 1774 the English Jesuit, Thomas Falkner, had called attention to the Spanish neglect of Patagonia, and the feasibility of conquering Chile from the Atlantic by advancing up the Río Negro and crossing the cordillera, using Indian troops as auxiliaries.[28] A century later Argentine authorities believed that neglect of the pampas had made Argentina equally vulnerable to a similar attack from Chile. Chilean expeditions had been reconnoitering Falkner's route in reverse, from Valdivia to the headwaters of the Río Limay, the southern affluent of the Río Negro, since 1849. A Chilean, Guillermo Cox, was specifically testing Falkner's thesis of the suitability of the Río Negro as a communications artery between Valdivia and the Atlantic when Indians on the Río Limay forced him to turn back in 1862.[29] The Indians of the pampas were a potential auxiliary force of the type Falkner envisioned, and reinforcements were available in the cordillera and in Chile.

Argentine authorities believed that any war with Chile for possession of Patagonia would be fought not in Patagonia itself, nor in its adjacent waters, but along the northern and eastern rim of the pampas. Indians, reinforced by a small number of regular troops, would carry the war to the Argentine frontier while the Chilean army crossed the low cordillera of Neuquén province and took possession of the Río Negro and all of Patagonia to the south. The pampas Indians would serve as a buffer to secure the new Chilean frontier on the Río Negro from Argentine attack

[27]Olascoaga, I: 40-45; Estanislao S. Zeballos, *La Conquista de Quince Mil Leguas* (Buenos Aires: La Prensa, 1878), pp. 311-12.

[28]Thomas Falkner, *A Description of Patagonia and the Adjoining Parts of South America* (Hereford: C. Pugh, 1774; reprint ed., Chicago: Armann & Armann, 1935).

[29]Encina, 16: 143-88; Irarrázaval, pp. 157-89.

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by land, while Chile's superior navy guaranteed Patagonia's security by sea. Argentine authorities believed such a strategy feasible. The Indians of the cordillera had reportedly offered military assistance to Chile when the boundary dispute reached the brink of war in 1878.[30] The danger was compounded by Argentina's relations with her Platine neighbors. She was engaged in the Paraguayan War from 1865 to 1869, during which the Indians freely ravaged the frontier. When the war ended, and attention could once again be turned westward and southward, war with Brazil seemed imminent over Argentine ambitions in the Paraguayan Chaco. Even when that danger receded, Argentina had to continue to weigh the Brazilian attitude in any decision that might lead to conflict with Chile.[31] A Chilean alliance with Brazil, or a Chilean attack that simply coincided with any Argentine conflict in the Plata, would increase the vulnerability of the pampas frontier to an assault by Indian auxiliaries.

Argentine activity to buttress its claims to Patagonia in the 1860's and 1870's was accompanied by activities in the 1870's to wrest control of the pampas from its Indian masters. The basic strategy was to interpose a military cordon between the Indians and the ranches of the frontier, so as to deny the Indians access to the herds of the east, and thereby deprive them not only of their source of cattle, but of the horses upon which their very existence on the pampas depended. The strategy proved increasingly effective as the decade progressed. Roca's campaigns of 1878 and 1879 contemplated the establishment of the military frontier on the Río Negro and the Río Neuquen, so as to interpose a natural, easily-defended barrier that would end the cattle trade permanently and so bring peace to the pampas. But in the Argentine view, this was something that Chile could not allow. Jurisdictional disputes in the far south, that became increasingly numerous as the 1870's progressed, were interpreted as part of a Chilean strategem to divert national attention from the pampas frontier, and above all to force the postponement of Roca's campaign, so as to permit the Indians to retain their predominance and their potential as auxiliaries in a future war that would decide the control of Patagonia.[32]

[30]Arg. Rep., Comisión Científica, *Informe Oficial*, pp. xxii-xxiv; Arg. Rep., MRE, *Memoria*, 1879, I: 287-306; Olascoaga, I: 10-12.

[31]Burr, pp. 127-30; U.S., Dept. of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872-1882), 1872, part 1, pp. 35-43; 1874, pp. 84-86; 1876, p. 9.

[32]Olascoaga, 1880 ed., pp. 9-34; Irarrázaval, pp. 157-89; Arg. Rep., MRE, *Memoria*, 1877, I: xxi-xxvi, 192-233.

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Two weeks after Chile declared war on Bolivia and Peru in the War of the Pacific in April 1879, Roca set forth on the final campaign of the Conquest of the Desert. The Argentine frontier was established on the Río Negro and the Río Neuquén. For the first time, national authority was exercised over the entire pampas. The Andean cordillera and its Chilean inhabitants were also brought under Argentine control. Further, the nation acquired advanced bases from which to project its power southward into Patagonia by way of the Pre-Andean Depression, whether by diplomacy or by military force. But to Roca, the great importance of the Conquest of the Desert was that it terminated the cattle trade, and with it Chile's influence on the pampas, and denied her the military means to make good her claim to Patagonia. Argentine authorities from then on considered a satisfactory boundary treaty simply a matter of time.[33]

From the perspective of twentieth century revisionist historians, Chile missed its rendezvous with destiny by failing to press its claim to Patagonia when it could have done so successfully. There is question, however, of whether Chilean leaders of the nineteenth century ever entertained an ambition for Patagonia as a whole. The advent of steam navigation that turned Chile to the strait coincided in time with the discovery of the commercial value of guano as fertilizer that simultaneously reinforced her preoccupation with the north. She was engaged in the race with Peru for hegemony on the Pacific coast of South America, and in the diplomatic struggle with Bolivia for mineral rights in Antogafasta, that culminated in the War of the Pacific. Further, many Chilean leaders were not convinced by Amunátegui's arguments that Chile's claims were valid. And there was a widespread belief, based largely on Charles Darwin's writings, that Patagonia was worthless. It was beyond question that Argentina would fight to retain Patagonia, and there was a widespread consensus among Chilean leaders that whereas the strait itself was vital for Chile's future, the remainder of Patagonia was not worth a war.[34]

In 1865 Chile sent a diplomatic mission to Buenos Aires, its first since the boundary controversy began. The resolution of that controversy was among the mission's objectives. The Buenos Aires press, which pugnaciously sustained Argentina's position throughout the dispute, set the tone for the following decade and a half by greeting its arrival with the

[33]Olascoaga, 1880 ed., pp. 29-34; Olascoaga, I: 40-45, 127-30, 227-32; II: 231-38; Arg. Rep., Comisión Científica, *Informe Oficial*, pp. xxii-xxiv; Irarrázaval, pp. 157-89.

[34]Encina, 15: 519-60; Magnet, pp. 295-307.

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charge that Chile wanted war so as to seize Patagonia. But the Chilean envoy, José Lastarria, was skeptical both of Patagonia's worth and of Chile's claim to it. Disregarding his instructions to uphold Chile's claims to Patagonia as well as to the strait, he insisted that Patagonia was the possession of the Argentine Republic, and was not at issue. He proposed a boundary settlement in which Chile would receive all of Tierra del Fuego; most of the strait; and sufficient territory to its north for security and development. In Patagonia he suggested a boundary along the eastern bases of the cordillera approximately to the latitude of Lake Nahuel Huapí.

Lastarria's interests were clearly restricted to the strait. His proposition would secure to Chile the western portion thereof, and would assure land communication between Punta Arenas and Chile by way of Nahuel Huapí and the Andean Depression. As Lastarria was negotiating, the Chilean army was enjoying success in a campaign against the Araucanians that would make that route accessible.[35] His proposal, however, would abandon to Argentina the eastern cordillera north of the lake, the only part of Patagonia that Chile really effectively occupied. There has been speculation that even to the south of the lake Lastarria was prepared to accept the crest of the Andes as a boundary, leaving the entire eastern cordillera to Argentina, if he could thereby gain his ends in the strait. Lastarria's final position, then, would have been substantially that of the Bulnes government in 1843, and would not have secured for Chile even the whole strait, let alone Patagonia. Lastarria's government disapproved his proposal, but did not disavow it. Argentina, preoccupied with the Paraguayan War, was disinclined to pursue negotiations.[36] There the matter remained for the rest of the 1860's.

The boundary dispute began in earnest when the Chilean Minister of Foreign Relations, Adolfo Ibáñez, brought it up again in 1872. Ibáñez was convinced of Chile's rights to Patagonia, and was one of the few men in Chile to consider the area important. Perceiving future greatness for Argentina, he believed that Patagonia alone would permit Chile to maintain equilibrium with it.[37] Argentina's embarrassment in the early 1870's by a potential war with its one-time ally, Brazil, over the spoils of the Paraguayan War seemed to offer the opportunity for success. The struggle over Patagonia, however, was conducted in the shadow of far older rivalries on the Pacific coast, as well as in the Río de la Plata. As

[35]Encina, 14: 543-64.
[36]Encina, 15: 35-44; Burr, pp. 97-106; Arg. Rep., MRE, *Memoria*, 1882, pp. x-xxv.
[37]Encina, 15: 519-60; Magnet, pp. 319-22.

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Ibáñez sought to profit from Argentina's discomfiture, Peru and Bolivia concluded a secret pact against Chile and invited Argentina to join them. President Sarmiento gave the threat substance by referring the question to the Congress.

The danger to Chilean interests in the nitrate fields of Antofagasta constrained even Ibáñez's ambitions in Patagonia.[38] In the heat of bitter discussions he would assert that all of Patagonia belonged to Chile. But in practice his objectives were to obtain possession of the strait and a portion of the Atlantic coast, and to retain the extensive and rich valleys of the eastern Andes that were occupied by Chilean ranchers, which he believed indispensable supplements to the limited agricultural area of central Chile.[39] As negotiations progressed he sought accommodation by further moderating even that position, offering to divide Patagonia from the Atlantic to the cordillera at the 45th parallel, or approximately in half. He was willing to surrender not only the pastures of the eastern slopes, but land communications with Punta Arenas as well, in return for the strait and a boundary on the Atlantic coast. Patagonia was of merely potential value, even as a means of communication with the strait, for the Chilean campaigns against the Araucanians had been cancelled in 1870, and the land approaches southward remained closed. The strait, however, was the most important route of European commerce to the Pacific, and its possession was vital. Ibáñez explained that clearly to the Argentine Minister to Santiago, Félix Frias:[40]

> The possession of the Straits of Magellan in all its length is of such great importance for Chile, that in that possession she sees linked not only her progress and development, but also her very existence as an independent nation.

Possession of the strait in all its length included, for the Chileans, a boundary on the Atlantic coast. Argentina would concede the western portion of the strait, and half of Tierra del Fuego. But she would not accept a potential enemy on her southern flank, and was determined that Chile would not occupy any portion of the Atlantic coast, either in Patagonia or on Tierra del Fuego.[41] It was this point, and not the

[38]Burr, pp. 124-26.

[39]Encina, 15: 519-60; Magnet, pp. 319-22; Arg. Rep., MRE, *Memoria*, 1882, pp. x-xxv.

[40]Arg. Rep., MRE, *Memoria*, 1873. Apéndice, "Cuestión de Límites con Chile," p. 10; Burr, pp. 124-26; Magnet, pp. 315-19.

[41]Burr, pp. 132-34; Encina, 16: 139-42; Magnet, pp. 315-19.

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possession of Patagonia as a whole, about which the controversy raged for the remainder of the decade. When in the Treaty of 1881 Argentina yielded to Chile the entire strait, she so drew the boundary as to exclude Chile from the Atlantic, and wrung from her the agreement that the strait would never be fortified.

The debate between Ibáñez and Frias continued in Santiago for three years. With agreement unattainable, the scene of action finally shifted to Buenos Aires, where the Argentine Minister of Foreign Relations, Carlos Tejedor, and the Chilean minister, Guillermo Blest Gana, agreed in 1874 to submit the question to arbitration. This was the first of three fruitless agreements between the two countries to do so. But neither was to prove willing to risk an arbiter's decision. Bowing to the force of popular sentiment, Argentina's new president, Nicolás Avellaneda, cancelled the Tejedor-Blest Gana agreement in 1875.[42]

Negotiations were reopened in 1876 at the initiative of Chile, which appointed Diego Barros Arana as minister to Buenos Aires. Because he had close family ties in Argentina, his appointment was intended as a conciliatory gesture, and his instructions showed an inclination to compromise without conceding the basic Chilean position. Chile now sought a boundary, not on Ibáñez's 45th parallel, but on the Río Santa Cruz; or a minimum, on the Río Gallegos, farther south still. In effect, Chile demanded only the strait, and the closest natural boundary to the north. That, however, would still give her a presence on the Atlantic coast.[43]

Argentina's problems with her La Plata neighbors were at long last ending. Agreements signed with Brazil and Paraguay in 1876 in effect ended the Paraguayan War, and removed danger of war with Brazil. Argentina's attitude toward Chile became increasingly intransigent. In the disputed area between the Río Santa Cruz and the strait both countries began more and more to exercise sovereignty, granting licenses to foreign ship captains to load guano and salt there, and driving off ships licensed by the other. In 1876, when Chile seized a French ship, the *Jeanne Amelie*, which was loading guano under Argentine license, the Argentine press and public opinion expressed outrage, and prominent leaders demanded war. With a direct settlement impossible in such an environment, Barros Arana concluded the second set of arbitration agreements, with two successive Argentine foreign ministers, Bernardo de Irigoyen in May 1877 and Rufino de Elizalde in January 1878. In

[42]Encina, 15: 184-89, 207-11, 561-91; Magnet, pp. 312-15.
[43]Encina, 15: 561-91; 16: 189-240.

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both, Chile accepted the highest peaks of the Andes as the boundary. She thus recognized Patagonia as belonging to Argentina. The question to be arbitrated, then, was where the line should be drawn dividing their respective jurisdictions in the strait. It was agreed that, pending the arbiter's decision, Argentina would exercise jurisdiction over the entire Atlantic coast, to the mouth of the strait; and Chile, over the entire strait itself. The negotiators well understood that their delineation of interim jurisdiction would influence the arbiter's decision, and that they were drawing what would become the international boundary.[44]

Chile had returned to her traditional position that the cordillera was her eastern boundary. The only change that reflected the influence of Amunátegui's book and the Treaty of 1856 was her continued ambition in the eastern portion of the strait. These agreements, with minor modifications, became the Treaty of 1881, and are reflected on the map of South America today. But in 1878 neither country was ready for them. Chile wanted a natural boundary on the Atlantic, the Río Gallegos as a minimum, and Barros Arana had exceeded his instructions in not insisting on it. He was recalled in May 1878.[45]

Meanwhile, relations between the two countries continued to deteriorate. As her military columns enjoyed increasing success on the pampas, Argentina demanded Chilean cooperation in ending the cattle trade between the pampas Indians and Chilean merchants. The Chilean officials' denial of any knowledge of it, and refusal to assist in its suppression, embittered the Argentines' feelings.[46] At the same time, a series of major incidents between the Río Santa Cruz and the strait further aroused popular passions. Chile's seizure of the *Jeanne Amelie* in 1876 was followed by Argentina's driving off of a United States vessel licensed by the Chileans, the *Thomas Hunt*, in 1877. When an Argentine warship, *Fulminante*, that was being prepared to reinforce in the disputed region, mysteriously exploded at Buenos Aires later that same year, emotions reached a feverish pitch. The Argentine press charged Chile with complicity and screamed for war. In Chile, where public opinion and the media had been comparatively indifferent to incidents in Patagonia, public sentiment exploded in demonstrations against Argentina in the streets of Santiago in 1878. In this supercharged atmosphere

[44]*Ibid.*; Arg. Rep., MRE, *Memoria*, 1882, pp. x-xxv.

[45]Encina, 16: 189-240; Irarrázaval, pp. 125-42; Magnet, pp. 312-15; Arg. Rep., MRE. *Memoria*, 1882, pp. x-xxv.

[46]Irarrázaval, pp. 157-89; Olascoaga, 1880 ed., pp. 9-34; Arg. Rep., MRE, *Memoria*, 1887, I: xxi-xxiv, 192-233.

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Chile apprehended another vessel licensed by Argentina, the *Devonshire*, of United States registry. An Argentine squadron sailed southward, as both countries prepared for war.[47]

For Chile, the War of the Pacific was just months away, and tensions with its west coast neighbors were increasing. Argentina, on the threshold of the extraordinary economic growth of the 1880's, wanted only peace and the opportunity to develop. There was a general feeling that within a decade the country would be powerful enough to take the disputed territory without the uncertainties inherent in war. The imminent danger of a conflict that neither party wanted, therefore, prompted a renewed agreement to accept arbitration. The third arbitration agreement was concluded in Santiago in December 1878 by the Chilean foreign minister, Alejandro Fierro, and the Argentine consul, Mariano de Sarratea. As with the Barros Arana pacts, interim jurisdiction was to be exercised by Argentina on the Atlantic and by Chile in the strait. Despite the specific stipulation that this division should not influence the arbiter, it nevertheless implied Chilean abandonment of its Atlantic position, and there was considerable opposition in the Chilean press. But the impending war with Peru and Bolivia made peace with Argentina desirable, and in January 1879 Chile ratified the treaty. Argentina, now relieved of the threat of her own war with Chile by the outbreak of the conflict on the Pacific, officially rejected the pact in July 1879. When the Chilean minister, José Balmaceda, departed Buenos Aires shortly thereafter, relations between the two countries were virtually severed.[48]

Feelings against Chile were at such a point of intensity in Argentina that there was strong support for an alliance with Peru in the War of the Pacific.[49] But it was not in Argentina's interest to enter the conflict. Even a victorious Chile was expected to emerge from it so weakened that Argentina could dictate a boundary settlement. But when Chile, after its surprising victories, announced its intention of retaining the rich provinces of Antofagasta and Tarapacá permanently, Argentina began to fear that the settlement might rather be dictated by Chile, and to recognize the advantage of negotiating while Chile was still at war.[50] Meanwhile, Chile's territorial ambitions had raised a diplomatic offen-

[47]Encina, 15: 561-91; 16: 143-240; Irarrázaval, pp. 125-42; U.S., Dept. of State, *Foreign Relations*, 1879, pp. 13-15, 147; Arg. Rep., MRE, *Memoria*, 1882, pp. x-xxv.

[48]Encina, 16: 189-240, 502-13; Burr, pp. 134-36; Irarrázaval, pp. 125-42; Magnet, pp. 312-19; U.S., Dept. of State, *Foreign Relations*, 1878, pp. 86-87; 1879, pp. 14-15, 20-25.

[49]Irarrázaval, pp. 143-56; U.S., Dept. of State, *Foreign Relations*, 1879, pp. 20-21.

[50]Burr, pp. 143-46; Encina, 17: 431-41; Magnet, pp. 319-22.

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sive against her by non-belligerents opposed to war for territorial expansion. Argentina, while not accepting Peru's invitation to enter the conflict, had nevertheless assumed a benevolent attitude toward the allies, and she now played a leading role in the diplomatic maneuvering to contain Chile. Her activities encouraged Peru to continue resistance in the hope that the other nations might force Chile to foreswear her dismemberment. Chile, then, began to realize that a satisfactory boundary settlement in Patagonia might induce Argentina to give her a free hand in concluding the War of the Pacific.[51]

The prospect that incidents such as the seizure of the *Devonshire* in 1878 might be expected to recur until the boundary question was resolved, led Secretary of State James G. Blaine to encourage the United States legates to both countries to assist in seeking a solution. With relations between Argentina and Chile virtually severed since mid-1879, the United States ministers to Chile, Thomas A. Osborn, and to Argentina, Thomas O. Osborn, took advantage of the changing attitudes to act as mediators in the negotiation of a new treaty. Signed in July and ratified in October, the Treaty of 1881 was a reproduction of the agreements that Barros Arana had worked out with Irigoyen in 1877 and with Elizalde in 1878. It provides the boundaries that we see today on the map of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego. Chile received the Straits of Magellan in its entirety. Argentina received Patagonia, and achieved her goal of denying a potential enemy a position on her southern flank. Chile was excluded from the Atlantic coast; and while advancing to the entrance to the Atlantic, agreed that the strait should never be fortified.[52]

The Treaty of 1881 held the germs of continued controversy. The provision that the boundary be "the most lofty peaks that divide the waters" is based on the assumption that the highest ridge is also the watershed. In fact, it is not. To the south of the forty-first parallel the highest ridge was on one side, the watershed on the other. With Argentina claiming the former as the boundary and Chile the latter and neither willing to yield, the dispute again came to the verge of war until finally settled by arbitration in 1902.[53]

But just as the treaty itself ignored geographical realities, recriminations against the treaty by nationalist Chilean historians ignore the

[51]Encina, 17: 273-79, 576-93; U.S., Dept. of State, *Foreign Relations*, 1880, p. 9.

[52]Encina, 17: 431-41; Arg. Rep. MRE, *Memoria*, 1882, pp. x-xxv, 3-45; U.S., Dept. of State, *Foreign Relations*, 1879, pp. xv, 15-16, 147-48; 1881, pp. 6-10, 130-35.

[53]Ireland, pp. 20-27; Encina, 17: 576-93.

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reality of nineteenth-century international relations. Vital to Chile were the mineral wealth of the Atacama in the north; and the Straits of Magellan in the south. Despite Amunátegui's vista of a Chilean Patagonia, and the strategic importance attached to the Conquest of the Desert by nineteenth-century Argentine leaders, Chile consistently proved ready to settle for possession of the strait and only enough of Patagonia to secure it. Even Ibáñez was prepared to trade the Andean valleys for the strait. The real question at issue was whether there should be a Chilean presence on the Atlantic coast. There appears to be no evidence, therefore, that Chile really wanted all of Patagonia, despite her claims. Nor does it seem that taking it was within her capabilities. She could not have had Patagonia without war with Argentina, for Argentina would not accept her as a southern neighbor. But such a conflict would have forced Argentina into the alliance offered by Peru and Bolivia, and jeopardized vital Chilean interests both north and south. That the wealth of the Atacama proved ephemeral and the agricultural potential of Patagonia proved a necessary complement to the restricted lands of the Pacific slope are facts of twentieth-century life. In the nineteenth-century perspective, between the certain mineral wealth of the north, and the vague possibilities that might lie hidden in an unknown land, peopled by hostile savages, there could only be one choice.

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